

Christ Episcopal Church
Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Christ Episcopal Church
Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Owner: Rector, Wardens, and Vestry of Christ Episcopal
Church

Date of Erection: 1769

Architect: William Smith of Philadelphia

Builder: Daniel Halstead (Head workman), Josiah Halstead,
Othiniel Rogers, Jacob Dennis, Jr.

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: One

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - shingles
imported from England(?)

Interior walls - plaster,
wainscot sill high, ceiling
arched

Roof - pitch, slate over
original wood shingles

Historical Data:

The most zealous churchman in Monmouth County was Colonel Lewis Morris, later the first governor of the province of New Jersey. In writing to the Bishop of London in 1700 he said that there were thirty Quakers of both sexes who had a meeting house; the rest of the people had no religion and the youth were ignorant and debauched. He requested that a minister be sent to Shrewsbury. The request was referred to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. This society appointed the Reverend George Keith as missionary.

N. J

13 SHREW

1-

When Keith arrived in Shrewsbury, he was accompanied by the Reverend John Talbot who had been ship's chaplain on the boat that carried Keith to America, and who was so much impressed by the importance of Keith's mission that he joined him. Work was begun in Shrewsbury in 1702, which date is generally accepted as the establishment of Christ Church. The first services were held in private houses.

It has been stated that the first church was built in 1703-1704, but this we now know to be false because Governor Basse in writing to the Bishop of London in 1711 definitely mentions that there was no church in Shrewsbury. The first church was probably built about 1715; the present church was erected in 1769 under the rectorship of Mr. Cooke. It was not completed until two years later, for at a meeting of the vestry on April 2, 1771, it was decided to urge Daniel Halstead, the foreman, to finish the work that he had undertaken.

The church, according to the "Articles of Agreement" made between John Wardell and the Reverend Samuel Cooke on the one part and the four carpenters on the second part, was to cost three hundred pounds York currency. The dimensions given in the agreement specify that the church was to be sixty-five feet in length and thirty-eight feet in breadth. Two canopied pews were built on either side of the chancel; one for the governor and the other for the rector. In later years the governor's pew was occupied by the organ.

Originally, the tower of the church was on the main part of the structure. In 1874, a vestibule was added and the tower was shifted forward squarely upon it. The bell of the tower was made in England, and bears the royal crown; the date 1788 is moulded on the face. The organ was removed from the governor's

N. J.

13 - SHREW

1 -

pew and placed in the loft, and the chancel pews were retained as memorials.

The last rector of the old church and the first rector of the new church, the Reverend Samuel Cooke, was a Tory. When the War of Independence broke out, he was an unwelcomed personage in Shrewsbury and went to New York where he served as a chaplain in the British army; later on he went to Nova Scotia carrying with him some of the early church records and papers. He was drowned in trying to cross the St. Lawrence River. Some of these records have been returned to the church by the descendants of the Reverend Mr. Cooke. This probably accounts for the fact that part of the records are missing.

The church during the Revolution was used as a barracks for American's troops. The soldiers practiced musketry by shooting at the iron crown of England on the weather-vane; the effects their bullets are still visible on the metal ball beneath the crown.

There is a grave-stone imbedded in the floor of the south isle. This reads, "Here lies the body of Theodosius Bartow, who departed from this life the fifth day of October 1746". He was the son of the Reverend John Bartow of England. Upon his death he exacted a promise from his wife that the expectant child be named after him. The child being a girl was named Theodosia; she in course of time married Aaron Burr.

Among the treasures of the church is a Queen Anne Communion Service given to the church in 1708. In the vestibule hangs the original charter of the church granted by George III through Governor Burnett on June 3, 1738. The church also possesses a folio prayer-book printed in Cambridge in 1760,

N.J.

13 - SHREW

1 -

which was presented to the church by the Honorable William Franklin, illegitimate son of Benjamin Franklin and last royal governor of New Jersey. The church possesses a copy of the "Vinegar Bible", so-called because of the misprint making the parable of the vineyard the parable of the vinegar. This was given to the church in 1732 by Robert Elliston, Controller of His Majesties Customs in New York. The bishop's chair is of considerable interest; it was constructed and carved by a village carpenter from pieces of the old oak under which the congregation may have worshipped and in which the church bell hung.

At the northwest corner of the church is to be found the grave of William Leeds; Leeds was an early resident of Middletown. According to tradition, he is supposed to have been one of Captain Kidd's chief cohorts. He was a wealthy planter of the community and the church was largely supported by him. When he died he left 438 acres of land to Christ Church (this was shared also by Christ Church, Middletown - the two churches for years were considered as one parish). His neighbors looked upon it as conscience money; nevertheless, Christ Church still derives income from it. From this section of the country Captain Kidd recruited many of his crew, and he himself is supposed to have had a permanent residence near Middletown. His chief headquarters in 1669 was at Bays Landing, now Ideal Beach. Piracy in those days was not as disreputable as we might think. Kidd had been commissioned to "exterminate pirates" and his partners were the Governor of New York and the King of England. The merchants of Middletown, marketed Kidd's goods. Captain Kidd was hanged in England not on the charge of piracy, but on a feeble charge of having killed one of his mutinous

N. J.

13. SHREW

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crew. There is a tradition that Captain Kidd placed a hidden cross in Christ Church, Shrewsbury.

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Delatash, George A., local historian

Nelson C. Rutt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Rev. Dec. 1. '36, T.W.